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Arms and the cockpit

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YES, THAT WAS Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., sharing a podium with Sen. Bob Smith, R-N.H., earlier this month, backing a GOP-sponsored bill that would allow pilots to be armed in the cockpit. She evidently has seen the light. After months of failures and excuses from various government officials, she understands that the very "safeguards" that some place so much of their faith in -- armored cockpit doors, video cameras in passenger cabins with monitors in cockpits, hiring more armed air marshals -- will be a long time in coming, if at all.

Rep. Mike Honda, D-San Jose, apparently has not read or does not believe the information that satisfies his "sensible questions." Let's consider his concerns over a possible "errant shot." What's worse -- dealing with a relatively minor problem such as an unlikely cabin depressurization or a disabled aircraft computer system after thwarting a takeover attempt, or being killed at the controls and having the aircraft with all on board converted to a human-guided missile?

As one supportive senator stated in an exasperated response: "How can we trust a pilot with an \$80 million 747, but not trust him with a firearm?"

How indeed? Pilots are charged with the responsibility of protecting the lives of passengers and crew and possibly the lives of thousands on the ground,

yet high-minded officials insist on denying us the tools the overwhelming majority of us have been calling for in order to carry out that responsibility effectively. Half-hearted, "politically correct" stopgaps such as stun guns are not the answer. Firearms are.

The continued naive insistence that "pilots should simply stay alert and just fly the plane" is a dangerous denial of reality. It is completely impossible to function in this regard after your throat has been slashed.

Arming the cockpit now is still the best, most timely, most sensible solution.

Michael Miro is a senior caption for American Airlines who last wrote in favor of guns in the cockpit in October.

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